

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 210 681

CS 206 658

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TITLE Subject, Object, Privileged Position: Reader Response: Intentionality: Cognitive Theory . . .
PUB DATE Oct 81
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Pennsylvania Council of Teachers of English (25th, Harrisburg, PA, October 16-17, 1981). Last page may be marginally legible.
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Advertising; Elementary Secondary Education; Higher Education; *Language Processing; Language Skills; *Language Styles; Language Variation; Teaching Methods; *Writing Instruction; *Writing Skills
IDENTIFIERS *Linguistic Awareness

ABSTRACT

Much of the work being done in composition concerns language--an increased awareness and desire to know what it is, how it works, and how people use it to create themselves and their world. The need to review and to teach the basics is obvious, but to present grammar, punctuation, and diction--the building blocks of language that must be understood if a sense of awareness and appreciation is to develop--in traditional ways is likely to be counter-productive. Students must first have a feel for their language and how its parts work and can be made to work before they can realistically be expected to compose essays in standard written English. The use of advertising is one approach to language awareness. Examples of language manipulation in advertising can show students how language can be used in the written form to communicate a greater range of intended meanings than is possible when one considers writing as simply a matter of "saying it in writing," literally. Approaching grammar and punctuation by examining what each unit "says," seems to prove more effective than examining where each unit is used, when trying to get students to see both the language's logic and the possibilities for expanded communication because of that logic. Using this approach allows students to begin to see how the nonverbal elements of communication can be approximated in the written form.
 (HCD)

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Subject, Object, Privileged Position;
Reader Response; Intentionality;
Cognitive Theory . . . HELP!

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The focus of this paper is the title, especially the word HELP. The paper grew out of the frustration at not being able to find enough time to read everything I should be reading in order to keep up with 'Composition'--not my specialty area, but the bulk of my teaching load. Pen went to paper when I read the most recent RCN REPORTS, to which I shall return.

Surveying the field, three broad generalizations come to mind: first, entering freshmen in need of remedial work in English have been increasing; second, a general 'back to basics' movement is sweeping through education (a trend accelerated by the budget cutting mania rampant today); third, a combination of the other two, an increased awareness and concern for effective, innovative teaching.

Yet in the midst of this innundation of need--day-to-day classroom need--the pages of our professional journals have become battlegrounds for highly specialized, technical ideologies and methodologies. As examples, I offer three extracts from RCN outlining current research:

The present research was undertaken for the purpose of testing predictions concerning constraints on memory retrieval during the idea generation phase of the writing task. These predictions were derived by the combining of current network theories of memory with a model of recall based on a probabilistic search of associative memory. The constraints were distinguished as those imposed by the individual, writer's LTM, and those imposed by the writing task, topic specificity and audience type. The effects of these constraints were divided into three major aspects: organization, interference, and temporal characteristics.

Empirical and theoretical support for a development decentering effect in elementary children's writing as reflected in the mode of argumentation.

Rationale: What kind of information did/do you hope to gain from your study? Study designed to shed light on "layering" of embeddings in composing, especially as such tends toward developmental effects/patterns; also, correlating paratheoretical aspects of composing (e.g., handwriting, skill, spelling) with process patterns forms part of study.

This wealth of new research is good for us professionally and intellectually, but the classroom "how's" in much of the recent material often seem to have been glossed over in the rush for theoretical excellence (perhaps measurable in jargon levels), and the rush for 'publication'. For example, how does the newcomer to the underlying ideologies, theories and methodologies involved in structuralism, phenomenology, Russian formalism, and the influential assimilations punctuating the works of Lacan, Barthes, Heath, Soller, translate into the day-to-day activities of a remedial or beginning composition class a statement like that made by Prof. Brook Thomas in his excellent lead article entitled "Re-Reading, Re-Writing" in the February, 1981 issue of CEA Critic: "The model I work with is the phenomenologically based one advocated by Wolfgang Iser in The Implied Reader in which the traditional dualism between subject and object collapses".

Problems of translation and presentation are heightened on many of Pennsylvania's more rural, commuter-based two-year campuses and community colleges, where the class is likely to consist largely of first generation college students who are highly but narrowly career-oriented, and see no rhyme or reason for the required

English composition course (or courses) which does not directly relate to their major.

In such a setting, many students exhibited what might be termed low language awareness. By this I mean students who have simply never thought about what language is and how it is used to communicate; students who have been rotely hearing, using, and assuming to be correct a local dialect form of the language, one often riddled with cliches, colloquialisms, slang, and illiteracies, for 18+ years.

How do we make our students--who for the most part live in a visual/aural world--more aware of the written word; how do we instill in them a feel for their language, its range, and inherent logic; how do we transform these students into proficient, or at least adequate, writers in a term or semester, at the same time attempting to make use of the wealth of new research in composition to stimulate interest and aid retention of newly acquired skills? A long sentence and a tall order.

If one can put aside critical/methodological loyalties and terminologies for a moment, at the heart of much of the new work being done in composition is language--an increased awareness and desire to know what it is, how it works, and how we use it to 'create' ourselves and our world. For those with the appropriate backgrounds or academic training, the various new terminologies are familiar and reassuring. But for those not so equipped, the jargon can be frustrating, annoying, and even damaging when inadvertently misinterpreted. For example, the "subject/object" distinction referred to earlier needs to be read/interpreted within a

complementing/contrasting context which would include Hegel, Marx, Freud, phenomenologists, structuralists, formalists, and especially the works of Jacques Lacan (and the army of scholars who march in and out of his writings), but then could only be 'understood' within Isser's own particular interpretation and contextual use of the concepts and terms.

But the need to know so as to be able to assess, use and/or reject for the betterment of our own teaching is still present. Time to read and to study each new theory, against its appropriate background, is what is lacking.

We all share professional responsibilities to our students and to ourselves to keep abreast of the most recent advances in the fields of composition and the pedagogy of composition. But the same responsibilities also hold in our individual specialty areas. Add to this the total time spent on each course (conferences, office hours, grading and preparation time), departmental, college and university commitments, and the increasing demands for research, scholarly activity and publication many are experiencing on the road to tenure, and one of the sources of the frustration suffered when looking through RCN becomes apparent: amidst this wealth of new research designed to aid us in bettering our understanding of language and how it functions in the writing processes, all of which 'infers' some measure of improvement to be gained in daily teaching skills and effectiveness, few but the specialists can immerse themselves to the degree necessary.

I recently received some information from an old grad school chum now at UCLA, working in Educational Statistical Analysis. He is concluding a study of patterns in entry-level liberal arts faculty, spanning the 1978-1979, 1979-1980, and 1980-1981 academic years. He wrote that his preliminary results in one area (which I thought made some sort of comment on the levels of frustration to which I've been referring) show that although the number of successful candidates for tenure has declined only slightly, the divorce rate among that same pool of faculty has increased steadily. He said he suspects this will appear as "dramatically increased" when the study is finally published. His only other comment was, "We're trying, but we are also paying".

Back to the issue--

Despite these problems, there is an air of excitement about the growing attention being paid to basic writing skills, the written/printed word in general, and the art of teaching. Yet many who appear on the first day of the required freshman English course seem less than excited about 'English Composition'; sometimes even lapsing into terror, especially when learning the course covers "grammar". Even the most conscientious student can become alienated by the repetition of hearing, memorizing for the examination, and forgetting immediately after the exam, basically the same rules, presented in basically the same format.

The need to review, to teach basics is obvious, but to present grammar, punctuation, diction--the building blocks of language which

must be understood if a sense of awareness and appreciation is to develop, and in turn foster retention--in traditional ways is likely to be counter-productive. In short, students must first have a feel for their language and how its parts work and can be made to work, before they can realistically be expected to be able to compose essays in SWE/AEF.

I am not saying that students do not need to know, or at least have a working knowledge of those rules. What I am suggesting is that they first must have a feel for their language: what it is, what it can do, what it can be made to do, and what it cannot do. They need to discover, to see its inherent logic and its enormous range. For example, while most students are aware of dialects--people from New York have them--they are often unaware of their own particular dialect. Pointing out striking, but common dialect elements, terms such as pop vs soda and milk shake vs frappe, greasy vs greazy, perhaps enlivened with differences between American English and British English, such as an American's tennis 'warm up' vs the Britian's tennis 'knock-up', 'phone me' vs 'ring me' or 'give me a tinkle', American cigarettes/smokes/butts vs British fags, can go a long way in beginning to instill a sense of language in students.

If what I am terming 'language awareness' and lack thereof do indeed strike significant, common chords amidst the theoretical/methodological cacaphony, then we are making headway in its translation into day-to-day classroom activities.

I suspect that several papers at most English conferences offer theoretically-based innovative approaches to the teaching

of freshman composition. As my Department Co-Ordinator said, "One of the driving forces and frustrating things about teaching is that one never quite gets it right". We need to share successful approaches, particularly at the local, regional and state levels where common problems can realistically be approached, and especially now when demands on resourcefulness are increasing and travel funds to national meetings are decreasing.

Many of the presentations I've heard at various conferences have been quite helpful in working on my own teaching strategies and techniques. I'd like to offer one that I have found helpful in terms of increasing language awareness, and which also affords a direct application of much of the current linguistic and psycholinguistic research in a form immediately useful to the student. This 'immediacy' was a key factor for me, even though I began by looking for some vehicle which would allow me to utilize my own academic interests (critically; structuralism, phenomenology, Russian formalism, and Lacanian theory: literature; James Joyce, particularly Finnegans Wake). If students relate to, that is, use in daily living, the material from any course, studies have shown retention of material and basic understanding to be significantly higher, and considerably deeper. To be really successful, 'English Composition' would have to extend beyond the 75 minutes on Monday, Wednesday, Friday.

In moving some once-read papers, I came across an article I'd cut out of the Honolulu Star Bulletin, in 1974, during my first year of graduate school. The article *****HANDOUT***** by S.I. Hayakawa is entitled "Poetry as Ads". That was it! My

vehicle was to be advertising--all my students were avid consumers.

The ads Hayakawa used in the article are common, relevant, and within memory. But fortunately only within the early memory of 18 year old freshmen. Fifth Avenue's language awareness and skills have matured considerably. Occassionally they have backfired as well, sometimes providing an instructor's wish come true, such as when Wendy's launched its disasterous slogan, "Ain't no reason to go anywhere else".

The first time I tried using advertizing in a language awareness portion of a composition class I had excellent luck: some students continued a 10-15 minute classroom presentation into a personal, term-long investigation and an unsolicited term paper presented by the class. It began when a few students were investigating the name of a then-new, cheap shampoo--Suave.

Aside from the lower price of the product, the name 'Suave' has very appealing denotations and connotations; so invitingly ambiguous they can easily be fantasized into everyone's egocentric self-concept of 'suave' (Lacan's stade du miroir and imago). Good name. But what we were all to discover was that just in case the consumer had no 'suave' self-image, or, his/her major concern was price (since he/she was looking at this shampoo in the first place, instead of one of the more expensive but nationally known brand name products), the name also served to reinforce, psycholinguistically, the financial aspect on the way to word recognition.

It seems that language conscious ad men did some research and discovered that 'suave' is a term which the average American infrequently or even rarely saw in print. When initially confronted

with the product's name, cognitive sounding-out of familiar and unfamiliar resulted in the word's dissociation into s-U-a-v-e; or, U-save.

Using ads as vehicles to increasing language awareness seemed to force students to take a second look at language and to be more concerned, to think, about how best, most fully, to express their ideas: to be original, imaginative, to use language in a more conscious way when composing their essays.

Through examples of languages manipulation in advertising students can be shown how language can be used in the written form to communicate much more of the range of intended meanings than is possible when one considers writing simply a matter of 'saying it in writing', literally. Approaching grammar and punctuation by examining what each unit 'says', seemed to prove more effective than examining where each unit is used, when trying to get students to see the language's logic, and possibilities for expanded communication because of that logic. By doing so, students begin to see how the non-verbal elements of communication we all rely on so heavily in daily life to convey, or conceal, the full range of our intended meanings can be approximated in the written form: an approach or strategy not unlike Donald Murray's "toolchest"--helping student 'see' the how's, where's and why's of composing any piece of writing.

Some contemporary research (as yet unpublished) treats these and similar matters on a compositional level and can also be valuable in increasing written language awareness.

Description or Abstract:

Paragraphing instruction needs a revolution. Paragraphs are not constructed according to the five, ten, or fifteen development patterns currently expounded in textbooks, nor do readers depend on them. Instead readers bring expectations to a text, depending on convention and psycholinguistic constraints.

Paragraphs have a dual nature, visual substantive. The indented white space signals a break in the text where the principle of peripherality can operate. It also arouses in the reader a need for unity, internal cohesiveness, and external coherence--qualities characteristic of all good discourse and not specific to paragraphs. Thus learning topic/comment, theme/illustration, etc. modes of development will not necessarily help students write effective paragraphs.

Two activities will help:

1. Teaching students to understand their readers' expectations. They should understand that what comes first will be treated as an orienting sentence and what comes last will have special emphases, willy-nilly.
2. Deferring paragraphing to the revising process, not insisting on it during composing. Paragraphs are not generated--they are carved out of material already produced. Students should be encouraged to experiment with different orders and arrangements of sentences to see how sense and tone change when peripherality operates.

This paper includes a discussion of the research of Koen, Becker, and Young, and a reconsideration of Christensen's "generative rhetoric of the paragraph."

I am sure many of you use similar vehicles in your own classes. I'm certainly not suggesting that I've discovered anything startlingly new, or am the first to express such concerns,

or even to use advertising. Nor am I suggesting that class periods need be consumed with advertizing analysis. What I am suggesting is that, given the state of our profession, we first need to awaken an awareness of and a feel for the language in our students before we can hope to help them improve, permanently, their writing skills. We need to share teaching strategies and techniques, as well as the results of our research, if we are to meet the challenges we all face.

Poetry and Ads

By S. I. Hayakawa

ALDOUS HUXLEY once wrote. "Advertising is one of the most interesting and difficult of modern literary forms." He was certainly right. For some time it's been running through my mind that what advertising communicates and what poetry communicates are very much allied to each other.

To be sure, poetry is generally understood to be something very special, to be studied in school, to be read aloud on solemn occasions, to be enjoyed by cultivated people; whereas advertising is part of everyday life.

But let me point to some of the similarities between the two arts. At the obvious level, both poetry and advertising make use of rhyme, rhythm, and of words chosen for their connotative rather than their denotative value. The rhyme and rhythm are evident in every singing commercial.

TO CHOOSE just one example of connotation as opposed to denotation in words, consider the advertisement for Di-Gel that says it is an effective remedy for acid stomach because it contains "simethicone." Neither you nor I (unless you are a chemist) knows what "simethicone" is.

And that's exactly why they continue to talk about it. Because we don't understand the word, we are led to believe that it is something magical and wonderful, like "RD-119" that makes motor oils so much more effective. Effective communication in advertising so often means that no facts are communicated — only suggestions of magic, wonder and delight.

Poetry seeks ambiguity — overtones of meaning that continue to haunt your mind, like Tennyson's "God made Himself an awful rose of dawn."

Advertising also thrives on ambiguity. "Clear heads choose Calvert's." There are at least two meanings to "clear heads." Smirnoff's vodka "leaves you breathless." Breathless with delight? Or with a breath that does not reveal that you have been drinking? Or both?

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH, in one of his poems about rural life, described a clod-like peasant mentality in the following words: "A primrose by the river's brim/A yellow primrose was to him./And it was nothing more." To that poor fellow, a primrose was nothing but a primrose.

In other words, the man had no poetic imagination. To a poet the primrose could be a symbol for his love of Lucy, an evidence of the beauties of England in springtime, a mark of the benevolence of God — or whatever he wanted to make of the primrose.

The fellow, not being a poet, would not have made a good advertising copywriter either. The copywriter, if he had to advertise primroses, would make it symbolic of youth, gaiety, and good times, like Pepsi Cola; or of romance and aristocratic elegance, like the Helena Rubinstein line of cosmetics; or of solid, traditional American virtues, like Old Crow. In other words, the writing of advertising is very much a matter of poeticizing consumer goods.

WITH PICTURES and with copy, advertising casts an imaginative glow over otherwise commonplace items: Marlboro cigarettes suggest the free-spirited cowboys of the West. In Marlboro country, where the flavor is; Schlitz beer emphasizes the life lived with gusto; Salems suggest not the agonies of lung cancer, but the magic of sparkling brooks and budding trees in springtime; corn flakes, which used to be "the breakfast of champions," are now connected with thoughts of adventure in outer space; the Datsun, like the Emancipation Proclamation, "sets you free."

Poetry and advertising are alike, too, in inviting the reader to put himself into a role different from that to which he is accustomed. When you read "Horatius at the Bridge," you are for the time being, in imagination, a brave Roman soldier fighting off the barbarians. Likewise when you read "Playboy" (advertising or text or both), you are for the time being the sophisticated, pleasure-seeking, well-to-do man-about-town, with an enlightened connoisseurship about sports cars, wines and liquors, and women.

Oscar Wilde once said, in a moment of extreme flippancy or remarkable wisdom, "Life is an imitation of art." The more I have thought about this aphorism, the more profound it seems to be, because poetry and drama and the novel and movies and advertising exact of us the tribute of imitation. And insofar as they do so, they are all "creative" arts.

When I was a young English instructor, I used to think it pretentious and absurd of advertising agencies to refer to their art and copy-producers as the "creative division" of their companies. I do not think so any longer.

MOVIES, TV shows, popular music, and advertising all enter into our imaginations, and therefore affect our clothes, our attitudes — and ultimately our life-styles. Life is indeed an imitation of art.

Said Alfred Korzybski, the founder of general semantics, "Human beings are a symbolic class of life. Those who rule our symbols rule us." Advertisers, newsmen, novelists, movie makers and others who create and manipulate our symbols are a ruling class, whether they know it or not.

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